

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 NIAMEY 03986 071649Z

ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15

ICA-11 TRSE-00 OMB-01 SSC-01 OES-09 HEW-04 /091 W

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FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1353

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

C O N F I D E N T I A L NIAMEY 3986

E.O. 11652: XGDS

TAGS: PINT, NG

SUBJECT: CABINET CHANGE IN NIGER

REF: NIAMEY 3809

1. HINTS OF A CABINET SHAKEUP REPORTED REFTEL WAS CONFIRMED SEPTEMBER 5, WHEN GON ANNOUNCED SEVERAL KEY CHANGES IN MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIO. EDUCATION MINISTER MAJOR IDRISSE AROUNA, LONG A CLOSE KOUNTCHE ASSOCIATE, WAS DROPPED FROM THE GOVERNMENT AND REPLACED BY FORMER HEALTH MINISTER MOUSSA SALA. NEW CABINET LEVEL POST OF "MINISTER DELEGATED TO THE PRESIDENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH" WILL BE FILLED BY FORMER CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORTS MINISTER GARBA SIDIKOU. FORMER RURAL DEVELOPMENT MINISTER BOULAMA MANGA HAS BEEN SHIFTED TO CULTURE YOUTH AND SPORTS; HE WAS REPLACED BY FORMER NUMBER TWO BRAH MAHAMANE. VACATED POST OF SECSTATE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT HAS NOT BEEN FILLED). HEALTH MINISTRY PORTFOLIO WAS GIVEN TO ITS SECOND IN COMMAND, YAKAYA TOUNKARA. TOTAL NUMBER OF CABINET REMAINS SEVENTEEN, INCLUDING SIX MILITARY MEN AND ELEVEN CIVILIANS.

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PAGE 02 NIAMEY 03986 071649Z

2. COMMENT: IDRISSE AROUNA'S SURPRISE EXCLUSION FROM KOUNTCHE'S NEW CABINET CONTINUES A TREND THAT HAS SEEN HIM SLIP FROM A KEY KOUNTCHE ASSISTANT AND MINISTER OF BOTH DEFENSE AND EDUCATION TO SIMPLE UNASSIGNED MILITARY OFFICER TODAY. WE ALSO NOTE THAT IT IS SECOND TIME SINCE COMING TO POWER THAT KOUNTCHE HAS REMOVED FROM OFFICE THE INDIVIDUAL WHO WAS HIS ACKNOWLEDGED

SECOND-IN-COMMAND IN THE GOVERNMENT. ALTHOUGH IDRISSE AROUNA WAS PROMINENTLY FEATURED IN LOCAL MEDIA UNTIL JUST BEFORE RE-SHUFFLE, HE HAS NOT BEEN MENTIONED SINCE THEN. THE GENERALLY HIGH REGARD THAT KOUNTCHE HAS SHOWN FOR HIM (HE HAS REPEATEDLY BEEN ACTING HEAD OF STATE DURING KOUNTCHE'S FREQUENT ABSENCES FROM NIAMEY), HOWEVER, SUGGESTS THAT HE COULD RESURFACE IN THE NEAR FUTURE TO ASSUME SOME OTHER ROLE IN GON.

3. KOUNTCHE'S NEW CABINET APPEARS TO REFLECT RENEWED ATTENTION TO A CHRONIC SORE SPOT FOR HIS ADMINISTRATION: EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT. THE STUDENT RIOTS, STRIKES, AND SUBSEQUENT TOUGH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE (ENGINEERED LARGELY BY IDRISSE) THAT MARRED THE 1976-77 SCHOOL YEAR HAVE LEFT BAD FEELINGS BETWEEN THE ADMINISTRATION AND THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY. IDRISSE'S LEADERSHIP ROLE AT THAT TIME AND PRESENT REPUTATION AS AN TOUGH DISCIPLINARIAN WOULD NOT HAVE HELPED IN A NEW EFFORT TO MEND FENCES WITH THE EDUCATION ESTABLISHMENT. IN REPLACING IDRISSE WITH MOUSSA SALA, A RESPECTED, CAPABLE ADMINISTRATOR, AND CREATING A NEW MINISTER POSITION RESPONSIBLE FOR "HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH", KOUNTCHE COULD BE SIGNALLING HIS DESIRE TO PUT PAST DIFFERENCES ASIDE AND CONCENTRATE ON A MORE PRODUCTIVE AND LESS TEMPESTUOUS FUTURE FOR NIGER'S EDUCATION PROGRAM.

4. SIGNIFICANT, TOO, IS THE CADRE OF CABINET OFFICERS THAT HAS NOT CHANGED. MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ECONOMIC
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 NIAMEY 03986 071649Z

AND FINANCIAL WELL-BEING OF NIGER REMAIN IN PLACE, INCLUDING MINES (RESPONSIBLE FOR URANIUM DEVELOPMENT) ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, FINANCE AND PLAN. WITH NIGER'S BRIGHTENING ECONOMIC PROSPECTS BEFORE HIM, KOUNTCHE APPARENTLY IS SATISFIED WITH THE TEAM THAT IS TO DIRECT THE ECONOMY OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS.

5. GON ALSO ANNOUNCED TEMPORARY REPLACEMENT OF CAPTAIN DANDI ABARCHI, PREFET IN ZINDER, GRANTED LEAVE FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES, AS WELL AS CHANGES OF A NUMBER OF LESSER OFFICIALS.KEOGH

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